

Order For Marriage

an inclusive version

This order has been adapted from United Church of Christ Book of Worship Order for Marriage to provide language that may be used for any marriage, regardless of gender.

INTRODUCTION

The essence of marriage* is a covenanted commitment that has its foundation in the faithfulness of God's love. The marriage ceremony is the glad occasion on which two people unite in the mutual exchange of covenant promises. The one presiding acts as an official representative of the church and gives the marriage the church's blessing. The congregation joins in affirming the marriage and in offering support and thanksgiving for the new family.

It is the responsibility of the one who presides to meet with the couple prior to the marriage ceremony in order to counsel them concerning the Christian understanding of this relationship.

Congregational participation, ethnic traditions, and local customs may be taken into consideration when planning the Order for Marriage. Hymns and other music of joy, praise, and thanksgiving may be included in the service after consultation with the congregation's music leaders and in keeping with a sense of the appropriateness of their use in a religious service. Psalms may be sung or said responsively, and other readings or statements may be used.

The one presiding may invite the couple to share in the writing and planning of their service. A Christian marriage ceremony is a service of worship offered to God. Family and friends of the couple may be invited to share the leadership of the service by reading scripture or by offering prayers or in other ways.

If the couple desires to be married within the regular Sunday service of the congregation, the Order for Marriage may be celebrated following the sermon.

If a couple requests Holy Communion on the occasion of their wedding, a Service of Word and Sacrament may be used as indicated in this order. The one presiding needs to use informed judgment as to circumstances in which Holy Communion can be celebrated meaningfully and with theological and biblical integrity. The religious affiliations of those to be assembled for the wedding will affect the decision. When a Service of Word and Sacrament is used, the prayers and other elements of the service printed here may be substituted in the proper places in that service.

All present may more easily participate in the service if a copy of this order is available to them in a bulletin.

It is the responsibility of the one presiding at the marriage to understand and conform to the laws in the place where the ceremony is to be held.

* Some may choose, for legal or personal reasons, to substitute other terms such as "holy union" or "sacred covenant" throughout this order.

OUTLINE

Prelude
Entrance
Greeting
Introduction
Prayer
Reading of Scripture
Sermon
Declaration of Intention
Pledge of Support
Vows of the Marriage Covenant
Exchange of Symbols
Announcement of Marriage
Blessing
Passing the Peace
Order for Holy Communion
Prayer of Thanksgiving
Prayer of Our Savior
Benediction
Hymn or Postlude

PRELUDE

ENTRANCE

Banners, ribbons, flowers, candles, white carpeting, or other items may be used in the procession in accordance with local custom. A hymn, psalm, canticle, or anthem may be sung, or instrumental music may be played.

The couple to be married may enter the sanctuary together or separately. They may be accompanied by their parents, other members of the family, and friends. People in the congregation who are able may stand for the processional.

GREETING

The couple to be married and the wedding party may stand, if they are able, facing the one presiding. The one presiding may use one of the following greetings or another one based on scripture.

A

PASTOR

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.¹

PEOPLE

And also with you.

B

PASTOR

Love comes from God. Everyone who truly loves is a child of God.² Let us worship God.

INTRODUCTION

The one presiding may state the Christian understanding of marriage, using one of the following or other words.

A

PASTOR

Dearly beloved, we are gathered here as the people of God to witness the marriage of name and name. We come to share in their joy and to ask God to bless them. Marriage is a gift of God, sealed by a sacred covenant. God gives human love. Through that love, two persons come to know each other with mutual care and companionship. God gives joy. Through that joy, they may share their new life with others as Jesus shared new wine at the wedding in Cana. With our love and our prayers, we support name and name as they now freely give themselves to each other.

B

PASTOR

Dear Friends, we have come together in the presence of God to witness the marriage of name and name, to surround them with our prayers, and to share in their joy. The scriptures teach us that the bond and covenant of marriage is a gift of God, a holy mystery in which two become one flesh, an image of the union of Christ and the church. As this couple give themselves to each other today, we remember that at Cana in Galilee our Savior Jesus Christ made the wedding feast a sign of God's reign of love. Let us enter into this celebration confident that through the Holy Spirit, Christ is present with us now. We pray that this couple may fulfill God's purpose for the whole of their lives.

PRAYER

One of these, a prayer of confession with an assurance of pardon, or a prayer for illumination may be offered.

PASTOR

Let us pray.

A

ALL

O God, we gather to celebrate your gift of love and its presence among us. We rejoice that two people have chosen to commit themselves to a life of loving faithfulness to one another. We praise you, O God, for the ways you have touched our lives with a variety of loving relationships. We give thanks that we have experienced your love through the life-giving love of Jesus Christ and through the care and affection of other people. At the same time, we remember and confess to you, O God, that we often have failed to be loving, that we often have taken for granted the people for whom we care most. We selfishly neglect and strain the bonds that unite us with others. We hurt those who love us and withdraw from the community that encircles us. Forgive us, O God. Renew within us an affectionate spirit. Enrich our lives with the gracious gift of your love so that we may embrace others with the same love. May our participation in this celebration of love and commitment give to us a new joy and responsiveness to the relationships we cherish; through Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

PASTOR

Through the great depth and strength of God's love for us, God reaches out to us to forgive our sins and to restore us to life. Be assured, children of God, that God's love enfolds us and up builds us so that we may continue to love one another as God has loved us.³

B

ALL

Gracious God, always faithful in your love for us, we rejoice in your presence. You create love. You unite us in one human family. You offer your word and lead us in light. You open your loving arms and embrace us with strength. May the presence of Christ fill our hearts with new joy and make new the lives of your servants whose marriage we celebrate. Bless all creation through this sign of your love shown in the love of name and name for each other. May the power of your Holy Spirit sustain them and all of us in love that knows no end. Amen.

READING OF SCRIPTURE

The congregation may be seated. One or more scripture lessons may be read by the one presiding, by members of the family, or by members of the wedding party. If Holy Communion is to be celebrated, it is appropriate that the readings include a Gospel lesson. A hymn, a psalm, or other music may be offered between readings or before or after the sermon. Passages for consideration for use include the following ecumenical suggestions.

OLD TESTAMENT

Genesis 1:26-28, 31; 2:18-24

Ruth 1:1-8, 14-17

1 Samuel 18:1b, 3, 20:16-17, 42a

Psalms 23, 33, 34, 37:3-7, 67, 100, 103, 112, 117, 121, 127, 128, 136, 145, 148, 150

Song of Solomon 2:8-13, 8:6-7

Jeremiah 31:31-34

Isaiah 54:5-8

Hosea 2:16-23

EPISTLES

Romans 8:31-39; 12:1-2, 9-18

1 Corinthians 6:15-20, 13:1-13

Ephesians 3:14-21; 5:2, 21-33

Colossians 3:12-17

1 Peter 3:1-9

1 John 3:18-24, 4:7-16

Revelation 19:1, 5-9

GOSPELS

Matthew 5:1-12; 5:13-16; 7:21, 24-29; 19:3-6; 22:35-40

Mark 10:6-9, 13-16

John 2:1-11, 15:9-17

SERMON

A brief sermon, charge, or other response to scripture may be given. Depending on the religious affiliations of those gathered for the marriage service, it may be appropriate for all who are able to stand and say a creed or affirmation of faith. Forms of the United Church of Christ Statement of Faith, historic creeds, and other affirmations are in the Resource Section, beginning on page 509.

DECLARATION OF INTENTION

PASTOR

addressing the couple

Before God and this congregation, I ask you to affirm your willingness to enter this covenant of marriage and to share all the joys and sorrows of this new relationship, whatever the future may hold.

PASTOR

addressing one

name, will you enter into the covenant of marriage with name, and will you love *her/him* faithfully as long as you both shall live?

ONE

I will, with the help of God.

PASTOR

addressing the other

name, will you enter into the covenant of marriage with name, and will you love *her/him* faithfully as long as you both shall live?

ONE

I will, with the help of God.

PLEDGE OF SUPPORT

This pledge of support should be used at the discretion of the pastor and in consultation with the people involved. It allows the family and congregation to pledge their support and encouragement to the couple. It is important to consider use of the pledge when there are children from previous relationships. Children who will share in the new family may be addressed in these or similar words. They may stand, if able, at their places or may move near the couple.

PASTOR

addressing each child by name,

name(s), you are entering a new family. Will you give to this new family your trust, love, and affection?

EACH CHILD

I will, with the help of God.

PASTOR

addressing the couple

name and name, will you be faithful and loving parents to names of child(ren)?

COUPLE

We will, with the help of God.

The pastor may invite the immediate families of the couple, including adults or younger children from previous relationships, to stand in place, if they are able, and to offer their support in these or similar words.

PASTOR

addressing the families

Will the families of name and name please stand/please answer in support of this couple. Do you offer your prayerful blessing and loving support to this marriage? If so, please say, "I do."

FAMILY MEMBERS

I do.

All family members may be seated. Person(s) who escorted the couple may be seated with their families. The pastor may address the congregation in these or similar words.

PASTOR

addressing the congregation

Do you, as people of God, pledge your support and encouragement to the covenant commitment that _____ *name* _____ and _____ *name* _____ are making together? If so, please say, "We do."

PEOPLE

We do.

An intercessory prayer, using the following or other words, may be offered.

PASTOR

God of our mothers and of our fathers, hear our pledges encouraging and supporting this union of _____ *name* _____ and _____ *name* _____. Bless us as we offer our prayerful and loving support to their marriage. Bless them as they pledge their lives to each other. With faith in you and in each other, may this couple always bear witness to the reality of the love to which we witness this day. May their love continue to grow, and may it be a true reflection of your love for us all; through Jesus Christ. Amen.

VOWS OF THE MARRIAGE COVENANT

The pastor may introduce the covenant promises in the following or similar words.

A

PASTOR

_____ *name* _____ and _____ *name* _____, by your covenant promises shared with us, unite yourselves in marriage and be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.

B

PASTOR

_____ *name* _____ and _____ *name* _____, speak your covenant promises that you have come to offer God.

If able, the couple may face each other and join hands. They may say these or other words of covenant.

ONE

_____ *name* _____, I give myself to you in the covenant of marriage. I promise to love and sustain you in this covenant, from this day forward, in sickness and in health, in plenty and in want, in joy and in sorrow, as long as we both shall live.

ONE

_____ *name* _____, I give myself to you in the covenant of marriage. I promise to love and sustain you in this covenant, from this day forward, in sickness and in health, in plenty and in want, in joy and in sorrow, as long as we both shall live.

EXCHANGE OF SYMBOLS

It is recommended that the giving and receiving of rings or other symbols be shared equally by both partners.

PASTOR

_____ *name* _____ and _____ *name* _____, what will you share to symbolize your love?

The couple may name the symbol(s) and present them/it to the pastor, who may hold or place a hand on the symbol(s) and offer one of these or another prayer.

A

PASTOR

By these symbols/this symbol of covenant promise, Gracious God, remind name and name of your encircling love and unending faithfulness that in all their life together they may know joy and peace in one another.

PEOPLE

Amen.

B

PASTOR

Eternal God, who in the time of Noah gave us the rainbow as a sign of promise, bless these symbols/this symbol that they/it also may be signs/a sign of promises fulfilled in lives of faithful loving; through Jesus Christ our Savior.

PEOPLE

Amen.

If both partners receive symbols, options A and B are used.

A

ONE

name, I give you *this/these* symbol(s) as a sign of my love and faithfulness.

PARTNER

name, I receive this/these symbol(s) as a sign of our love and faithfulness.

ONE

name, I give you *this/these* symbol(s) as a sign of my love and faithfulness.

PARTNER

name, I receive this/these symbol(s) as a sign of our love and faithfulness.

ANNOUNCEMENT OF MARRIAGE

If able, the couple may stand or kneel and join hands, and the pastor may place a hand on their joined hands while announcing the marriage, using one of these or other words.

A

PASTOR

addressing the couple

name and name, you have committed yourselves to each other in this joyous and sacred covenant. Become one. Fulfill your promises. Love and serve God, honor Christ and each other, and rejoice in the power of the Holy Spirit. *addressing the congregation*

By their promises made before us this day, name and name have united themselves in the sacred covenant of marriage. Those whom God has joined together let no one separate.⁴

B

PASTOR

addressing the congregation

Those whom God has joined together let no one separate.⁵

addressing the couple

name and name, you are married with the blessing of Christ's church. Be merciful in all your ways, kind in heart, and humble in mind. Accept life, and be most patient and tolerant with one another. Forgive as freely as God has forgiven you. And, above everything else, be truly loving. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, remembering that as members of one body you are called to live in harmony, and never forget to be thankful for what God has done for you.⁶

BLESSING

If they are able, the couple may stand or kneel, with children from previous relationships who will share their household, if any, standing nearby. A blessing may be given for the couple or the family.

A blessing for the couple

PASTOR

The grace of Christ attend you; the love of God surround you; the Holy Spirit keep you that you may grow in holy love, find delight in each other always, and remain faithful until your life's end.

PEOPLE

Amen.

B blessing for the family

PASTOR

May the God of Sarah and Abraham, who watches over all the families of the earth, bless your new family and establish your home in peace and steadfast love.

PEOPLE

Amen.

PASSING THE PEACE

The one presiding may invite those who are able to stand and exchange gestures of peace.

PASTOR

The peace of God be with you always.

PEOPLE

And also with you.

The couple may embrace. Using the same words as the pastor or similar ones, they may move among the congregation exchanging the peace. After passing the peace, the people may be seated, and the couple may return to their places.

If Holy Communion is to be celebrated, the service continues on page 341; if it is not celebrated, the prayer begins.

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

The people may be seated. One of these or a similar prayer of thanksgiving and intercession may be offered.

PASTOR

Let us pray.

A

PASTOR

Most gracious God, we give you thanks for your tender love. You sent Jesus Christ to come among us, to be born of a human mother, and to make the way of the cross into the way of life. We thank you, too, for consecrating the union of two people in Christ's name.

By the power of your Holy Spirit, pour out the abundance of your blessing on name and name. Defend them from every enemy. Lead them into all peace. Let their love for each other be a seal on their hearts, a mantle about their shoulders, and a crown on their heads. Bless them in

their work and in their companionship, in their sleeping and in their waking, in their joys and in their sorrows, in their lives and in their deaths. Nurture them in a community of the faithful gathered about you.

B

PASTOR

Merciful God, we thank you for your love that lives within us and calls us from loneliness to companionship. We thank you for all who have gone before us. We thank you for our own parents, and for all, whether married or single, who are mother or father to us, and for countless parents whose names we do not know. We thank you as we grow to the fullness of the stature of Christ. Bless name and name, that they may have the grace to live the promises they have made. Defend them from all enemies of their love. Teach them the patience of undeserved forgiveness. Bring them to old age, rejoicing in love's winter more fully than in its springtime.

The following words of the prayer may be used if children who will share in the couple's household are present. If these words are not used, continue with option A or B of the prayer.

PASTOR

Bless *this child/these children*, name(s) of children, that *he/she/they* may find in this new home a haven of love and joy where Jesus Christ is honored in kind words and tender deeds.

A

PASTOR

Finally, in your mercy, bring name and name to that table where your saints feast for ever in your heavenly home; through Jesus Christ our sovereign Savior who, with you and the Holy Spirit, lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever.

PEOPLE

Amen.⁷

B

PASTOR

At the last, receive them and all of us at the love feast prepared for all the faithful in your eternal home, where Jesus Christ, with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, reigns in love for ever.

PEOPLE

Amen.

PRAYER OF OUR SAVIOR

Standing, sitting, or kneeling, all may sing or say the prayer received from Jesus Christ.

A

ALL

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen.⁸

B

ALL

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we

forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

C
ALL

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

D
ALL

Our Father-Mother, who is in the heavens, may your name be made holy, may your dominion come, may your will be done, on the earth as it is in heaven. Give us today the bread we need; and forgive us our debts, as we have forgiven our debtors; and do not put us to the test, but rescue us from evil. For yours is the dominion, and the power, and the glory for ever. Amen.⁹

If Holy Communion is not to be celebrated, continue with the benediction.

ORDER FOR HOLY COMMUNION

If the sacrament of Holy Communion is to be celebrated, a Service of Word and Sacrament may be used, beginning with the offering of the communion elements. The newly married couple, others in the wedding party, or members of the family may bring the communion elements to the table. The invitation and prayers below may be substituted for ones in a Service of Word and Sacrament. Holy Communion is properly the supper of Jesus Christ, and all Christians who are present are invited to participate. Practical arrangements for the wedding party will be necessary, such as chairs for them during parts of the service.

INVITATION

The pastor may go to the table and give this or another invitation.

PASTOR

This table is open to all who wish to receive Jesus Christ in company with all believers in all time and beyond time. This is the joyful feast of the people of God. Christ is present with gifts of new life, as once Christ was present at Cana in Galilee with the gift of new wine. We come to know Christ in the breaking of bread and the pouring of wine.

COMMUNION PRAYER

All who are able may stand. This prayer may replace the communion prayer in a Service of Word and Sacrament.

PASTOR

God be with you.

PEOPLE

And also with you.

PASTOR

Lift up your hearts.

PEOPLE

We lift them to God.

PASTOR

Let us give thanks to God Most High.

PEOPLE

It is right to give God thanks and praise.

PASTOR

Blessed are you, O God our Creator. From the womb of your being you brought forth worlds. Into mere dust you blew the breath of life, creating women and men to bear your likeness in the world. You create, love, and care for all that is. We praise and thank you, nurturing God, that in Jesus you bring joy and hope to loving hearts, and offer health and power to human relationships. Even the powers of sorrow and death could not contain Christ's joy. From the tomb our risen Savior came to share bread again among the beloved. In the glory of your banquet hall, Christ prepares a wedding feast for all the faithful who even now praise you.

PEOPLE

Holy, holy, holy God of love and majesty, the whole universe speaks of your glory, O God Most High. Blessed is the one who comes in the name of our God! Hosanna in the highest! The people may be seated or those who are able may kneel. At the words concerning the bread and wine, the one presiding may indicate the elements.

PASTOR

Merciful God, we remember that on the night of betrayal and desertion, Jesus took bread, gave thanks to you, broke the bread, and gave it to the disciples, saying: "Take and eat, this is my body broken for you." Likewise, Jesus took the cup of blessing and said: "Drink of this cup. It is the new covenant in my blood, poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this in memory of me."¹⁰ With joy we thank you, God of gladness and warmth, that at Pentecost you sent your Holy Spirit to dance about the heads of your people, enabling your word to be heard afresh. Now send your Holy Spirit on these gifts of bread and wine and on us that we may be set afire with your love and leap with joy at your presence. Pour out your blessing on name and name. May they sing a new song of your great love in communion with you and all your saints in heaven and on earth. May their love for each other proclaim the love of Christ for all of us. May the faithful service of all your people bring peace, justice, joy, and love to all the world; through Christ, with Christ, and in Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor are yours, Holy God, now and for ever.

PEOPLE

Amen.

If the Prayer of Our Savior has not been said earlier in the service, it may be said before the sharing of the communion elements.

The people may come forward or receive the elements where they are seated. If they come forward, the pastor may give each person the bread, and the newly married couple may offer the chalice(s) or individual cups. If trays of individual cups are used, the couple may be positioned at the sides of the pastor, next to attendants with empty trays for the used cups. Hymns of joy and thanksgiving may be sung by the congregation while the elements are being shared.

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

When all have been served and the table is in order, the wedding party may return to its place and all who are able may stand for the prayer of thanksgiving.

PASTOR

Let us pray.

ALL

Thank you, O God, for refreshing us at your table. By your grace you have nourished us with the living presence of Christ, the bread of life, that we may share life together. Send us forth in the power of your Holy Spirit to give ourselves in love until your entire human family is gathered at your table, glorifying and praising you in the name of Jesus Christ.

Amen.

BENEDICTION

All who are able may stand. One of these or another blessing may be given for all present.

A

PASTOR

Go forth in the love of God; go forth in hope and joy, knowing that God is with you always. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God and of Christ Jesus;¹¹ and the blessing of God, Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, be with you, and remain with you always.

PEOPLE

Amen.

B

PASTOR

May God bless you and keep you. May God's face shine upon you and be gracious to you. May God look upon you with kindness and give you peace.¹²

PEOPLE

Amen.

HYMN OR POSTLUDE

A hymn may be sung or other suitable music offered as the wedding party and congregation depart.

Footnotes:

1. 2 Corinthians 13:14, adapted.
2. Based on 1 John 4:7.
3. Based on an unpublished prayer by Ann Asper Wilson.
4. Based on Matthew 19:6.
5. Based on Matthew 19:6.
6. Adapted from *The Worshipbook – Services*. Copyright © 1970 The Westminster Press. Adapted by permission.
7. This prayer, except for the blessing of the children, is adapted from *The Episcopal Church The Book of Common Prayer* (Boston: Seabury Press, 1979).
8. International Consultation on English Texts.
9. From *Orders for Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer*, The New Century Hymnal, Copyright ©1994 The Pilgrim Press
10. Based on Gospel and Epistle accounts.
11. Phillipians 4:7, adapted.
12. Numbers 6:24-26, adapted.